

Headquarters Military Traffic Management Command

News Release

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Found in Haiti:

MTMC moves forgotten tank from World War II

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&

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Rhine River Detachment

A vintage American tank found in Haiti is on the way to a U.S. Army museum in Germany thanks to the Military Traffic Management Command.

MTMC moved the severely rusted tank by ship and barge to get it to Baumholder, Germany, where it will be completely restored.

In its half-century life, specialists with the U.S. Army's Center of Military History, Fort McNair, D.C., said they have traced the tank to multiple countries and locations.

The tank's recovery has created a sensation among military equipment enthusiasts. The tank is a nearly complete M3A1, Stuart tank still equipped with a 37mm cannon and engine air filters. The only thing missing from the tank is the cannon's breechblock.

With an assist from the Military Traffic Management Command, the tank is now on its way to complete restoration at a U.S. Army museum in Germany.

The 838th Transportation Battalion, Capelle aan den IJssel, the Netherlands, discharged the tank July 9 from the Faust at Antwerp, Belgium. The Rhine River Detachment, Mannheim, Germany, moved the ancient vehicle by barge to Baumholder. It arrived July 19.

“Classical military vehicle clubs were very interested in this tank because it is the first one arriving Europe in original configuration,” said John Slee, Chief, of the battalion’s traffic management division.

Photographs were sent to the “British Military Class Vehicle” magazine by Wolfgang Scherer, Chief, of the detachment’s operations branch.

”They went into raptures to hear about the arrival of a nearly complete M3 light tank in Europe,” said Slee.

The 37th Transportation Battalion moved the tank to the nearby 1st Armored Division Museum where it will join 40 other combat vehicles.

“We wish to restore it to its original 1942 condition both inside and out,” said Dan Peterson, Director, 1st Armored Division Museum.

The origin and individual history of the tank – one of 3,427 ever built – has been traced by the Center of Military History, said Mike Bellafaire, MTMC Command Historian.

Historical specialists said the tank first surfaced at the end of World War II when it was one of six – five M1s and one M3A1s sold by a European government to Haiti. The tanks were reconditioned by the Ferrari Motor Co., in Italy, and then shipped across the Atlantic Ocean.

The U.S. Army first became aware of the tanks in 1994 when a Special Forces team, which included museum specialist Jim Speraw, found the nonoperational tanks in Camp De Application, Haiti – a part of the Haitian Defense forces.

The center acquired the tanks for use in Army museums.

The M3A1 tank was moved to an Army depot in Anniston, Ala., and later shipped to the Army Reserve’s 88th Regional Support Command, Fort Snelling, Minn.

“The reason ‘Fort A.P. Hill’ is on some pictures of the tank is that it was originally going to that installation,” said Speraw. “It went to Minnesota instead.”

Recently, the tank was transferred to the Germany museum.

“Finding a vehicle like this is a dream come true for a military historian,” said Bellafaire.

Records indicate that 2,433 tanks – almost two-thirds of those produced – went to American allies through Lend Lease. Recipients included both British and Chinese troops. The rest went to the U.S. Army.

The most notable use of the tanks was in the North African campaign beginning in November 1942. This was the first tank to be used in combat there by the 1st Armored Division. Initially, the M3 was successfully used to defeat a larger force of Vichy French Renault tanks at Oran, Algeria. Later, the tank was used with success against weaker Italian armor.

With only a 37mm main gun and relatively light armor, the tanks were no match for the armor of Field Marshall Erwin Rommel’s Afrika Korps. The Stuart tanks were reduced to a reconnaissance and infiltration. In this new role, the tank’s low weight and high speed gave it a decided advantage.

In 1942, an improved version was developed with sloping armor. It was designated the M3A3, and was nearly the same as the next version, called the M5. All of these tanks were nicknamed the General Stuart, after the famous Confederate cavalry leader J.E.B. Stuart.

The entire Stuart series light tanks were replaced in 1944 with the much-improved M24 General Chaffee tank.

Sperlaw said the Center of Military History is interested in other World War II equipment that may have been left overseas. The center's shopping list includes Sherman tanks, half-tracks and armored cars. Speraw is available at (202) 685-2464.

Additional information on the 1st Infantry Museum is available at:
<http://www.baumholder.army.mil/museum/museum.htm>

(CAPTION)

Contractor Thierry van Zandebergen checks M3A1's paperwork on arrival of the tank in Belgium.

(photo by Karel Philipse)